CHRONICLE AND COMMENT

By ARTHUR BARTLETT MAURICE

MESSRS. LONGMANS, GREEN & CO. have just published "George Gissing; an Appreciation," by May Yates. For years in the United States there have been many avowed admirers of Gissing's work, and through glib and frequent allusion his name has become fairly familiar to American readers in general. But for all that there has never been a real Gissing audience in this country, and there is never likely to be one. In the first place to understand Gissing a superficial knowledge of London is not enough. Mere acquaintance with Trafalgar Square, the hotels of Northumberland avenue, the Tower, the Bank and Piccadilly Circus leaves the reader who dips into "Thyrza" or "The Year of Jubilee" or "The Town Traveller" as puzzled as if he had never strayed from his west Pennsylvania fireside. For it is not London but the various component parts of London that live in Gissing's books.

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GISSING wrote of Lambeth, or Camberwell, or Hoxton as the mood or the particular residence of the month or year moved him. Much more than the New Yorker ever thought of Harlem or Yorkville or Chelsea the Londoner thinks of the particular sections of his own city. The name Bayswater conjures up in his mind a highly respectable, monotonous drabness, just as mention of Stepney or Rotherhithe suggests a monotonous drabness that is not essentially respectable. Gissing's favorite *milieu* was a world of endless streets of "decently depressing" houses; shabby, dirty, neglected, obscure; a world where shrubs and trees are rarely to be seen, where flowers are quite unknown. "The streets of London are terrible to one who is both lonely and unhappy," he makes one of his characters say, "the indifference of their hard egotism becomes fierce hostility; instead of merely disregarding, they crush."

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LONELY and unhappy! Gissing was always lonely and unhappy. Occasionally he tried to think of his life as romantic, but the effort required to do so was painfully and patiently artificial. At one period in the seventies he was for a time in America and Germany; then he returned to London to write literally for daily bread. He has recorded: "I see the alley hidden on the west side of Tottenham Court road, where, after living in a back bedroom on the top floor, I had to exchange to the front cellar; there was a difference, if I remember rightly, of sixpence a week, and sixpence in those days was a very great consideration—why, it meant a couple of meals! . . . The front cellar was stone floored; its furniture was a table, a chair, a washstand and a bed; the window, which, of course, had never been cleaned since it had been put in, received light through a flat grating in the alley above. Here I lived; here I *wrote*. Yes, 'literary work' was done at that filthy deal table, on which, by the bye, lay my Homer, my Shakespeare and the few other books I then possessed."

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THERE is unquestionably a great deal of humbug written about the joys of the literary and artistic bohemia. Of course it is not intentionally humbug. But the writing man or the painter who has achieved affluence sees the privations of his youth through a softening haze. Thackeray, for example, receiving 100 guineas apiece from the *Cornhill* for his short "Roundabout Papers" and lolling in an armchair at the Athenæum, could recall pleasantly certain Paris dinners at two francs, fifty; Du Maurier, in his handsome house perched up on Hampstead, could be gay in writing of his *rapin* days; the American, Elihu Vedder, could tell gleefully in his reminiscences of the time when the roasted Italian chestnuts were doubly welcome in furnishing warmth for the hands before providing sustenance for the body. In after life the memory of those minor hardships became for these men "the wharves and the slips, and the sea tides tossing free" of Longfellow's "Lost Youth."

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BUT the time never came when George Gissing could laugh at bohemia. Even the sentimental adventures that fate had in store for him were so only in name. A squalid, sordid marriage over which it is better to draw the veil. Not only did he have to struggle on underpaid till the end; it was his destiny to earn his own livelihood from his earliest boyhood. Sticking to literature as a calling he lived in other cellars than the one already described. That particular one in the Tottenham Court road he rented at four and sixpence a week. His breakfast usually consisted of a slice of bread and a cup of water. A meal that cost more than sixpence was a feast. Thus living for most of his life he produced twenty-eight books of real quality, and when he died, December 29, 1903, no New York newspaper gave more than three lines to chronicling the event.

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THE spirit of a rich Bohemia of many lands and many aspects of life is in Edward Simmons's "From Seven to Seventy" (Harper & Brothers), which Mr. Oliver Herford, in a foreword which he calls an Interruption, characterizes as a narrative which for human interest can (in Mr. Herford's opinion) be compared only to that of Benvenuto Cellini. Without weighing so sweeping an indorsement or going back a few centuries for a comparison, these "Memories of a Painter and a Yankee" are to be recommended as unconventional, unusual and highly interesting. Here are vivid glimpses of life; keen first hand impressions of distinguished personalities. Himself a painter of international reputation, Mr. Simmons has naturally been rubbing elbows for two-score years with the men of letters, the men of the brush and the men of the buskin of Europe and America. Occasionally some one of these great men ev has had the temerity to interrupt him.

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MR. SIMMONS'S early life in the fifti was passed in the Old Manse at Concord from which Hawthorne plucked his mosses. A nephew of Emerson, as a boy he was thrown in contact with the stately and self-conscious great of New England. In his grandmother's sitting room in the Old Manse he used to dream until the caller came. Then he would retire to the corner and listen to the talk about anti-slavery, human freedom, States' rights, &c.—understanding not a word, but fascinated by the fervor of the speakers. Of this period he records: "I have seen gathered together in this parlor Emerson, Frank Sanborn, Charles Sumner and John Brown, the last short and squat, his great beard upon his breast and spreading his coattails before the fire like a pouter pigeon."

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THE Old Manse was a fitting setting for those rich personalities. It was filled with memories of Hawthorne's presence. To the boy Edward Simmons "Hawthorne always typified the haughty Southerner . . . Hawthorne was a hero to me, and whenever I read a romance, such as 'Ivanhoe' or the 'Iliad,' I pictured the conqueror as tall, broad, dark and spare, with a dark mustache. This was the way Hawthorne looked to me." Charles Sumner was a frequent caller. "I remember him most vividly upon one occasion. He had come in for luncheon. Mother, who left the intellectual part of the life to others and always said: 'I find philosophers have just as hearty an appetite as other people—especially for pie,' was in the kitchen. . . . Suddenly I felt a hand upon my head. 'My boy,' he said, 'when you grow up you'll find out two things. One is that all men have mothers, but I don't think you will ever meet any other man who has ever had a mother like yours.'"

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"ONE of my memories of the Old Manse," writes Mr. Simmons, "is that of the Thursday afternoon visits of Ellery Channing, the poet. I never saw anything written by him until I left the town. He was always asked to supper and always stayed, becoming thereby a part of the mental furniture of the place. He was old, fattish, disorderly, absent [illegible] and, to me, so unesthetic that I k[illegible] could not be a good poet. I d[illegible]lieve he was. A humbler man than Thoreau, who practically occupied the same position in the estimation of the Emersons. I remember with what was then for me horror, but now extreme sympathy, that years before his wife had left him because she had insisted upon his having a carpet in his study. This he kept patiently removing until, returning from a camping trip, he found it firmly nailed to the floor; so he pulled it up, tore it to strips and hurled it out of the window, thereby ruining the carpet and both their tempers."

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AFTER his career at Harvard—he was of the class of '74—Mr. Simmons went to find a California which was very different from the California of Bret Harte's stories and very different from the finished product of to-day. "The most characteristically Western survival of the 'days of forty-nine,'" writes Mr. Simmons, "were the San Francisco bars. . . . There was nothing less than 10 cents in town; nickels they gave away and pennies were thrown down the gutter. Everything was sold in bits. . . . Mexican, French, Canadian, small silver coins were all bunched together as 'bits,' and eight were called a dollar. . . . A drink theoretically cost a 'bit,' but if you gave a quarter in payment you received 10 cents change. They were bound to take 10 cents if you offered it, but too many deals of this kind in the same place elicited some such muttered remark as 'Tight Easterner,' or 'Why don't you take some of the furniture along with you when you go?'"

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SUGGESTIVE of Stevenson's journey across the continent is Mr. Simmons's account of how he returned East in an "emigrant train." It was what was known as traveling third class, and a ticket cost $65. "Peddlers sold pieces of canvas and straw mattresses at the station, and these we stretched across the seats in such a way as to make a comfortable bed. The rule was that if sixty-five people got together they could go through as a car and be a law unto themselves. So we 'fired out' the married men, the women and the children and made up our own crowd. . . . It had taken me seven days to get out West, but the trip back was thirteen. We were never certain where our car was to be from day to day. A freight train would come along and we would be hitched to it, jogging along slowly, only to be dropped at some Godforsaken flag station, with no way of knowing how long we were to wait. Then, of a sudden, would come the express, whisk us up and whirl us for several hundred miles."

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THEN came the author's life as a *rapin* at Julian's in Paris. Of that famous studio, which has played so conspicuous a part in the development of American art, Mr. Simmons writes: "Off the Passage de Panorama, which is just off the boulevard, in the dingiest place imaginable, was the Academie Julian. The room was dirty and dark, despite the skylight above; at one end a platform, and near it a soiled bit of drapery, behind which the women models stripped. . . . Julian . . . was a Hercules and quite a romantic figure, about whom there were many stories. They said he was the Masked Man who used to wrestle on the stage and at country fairs. He had been rather a good painter and had become a most successful business man. . . . The 300 francs he received from each one of us seemed a small sum; but the models were paid only a few cents a day, the rental of the studio must have been negligible, and such men as Lefebvre, Bougereau, Tony Fleury and after him Tony Robert Fleury, gave their instruction gratuitously."

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THE life at Julian's was substantially the life which Du Maurier used as the background for the early chapters of "Trilby." Most of the students were poor. Simmons had $50 a month, but he roomed with a man who had only $20 for everything—and he made it do. They lived in

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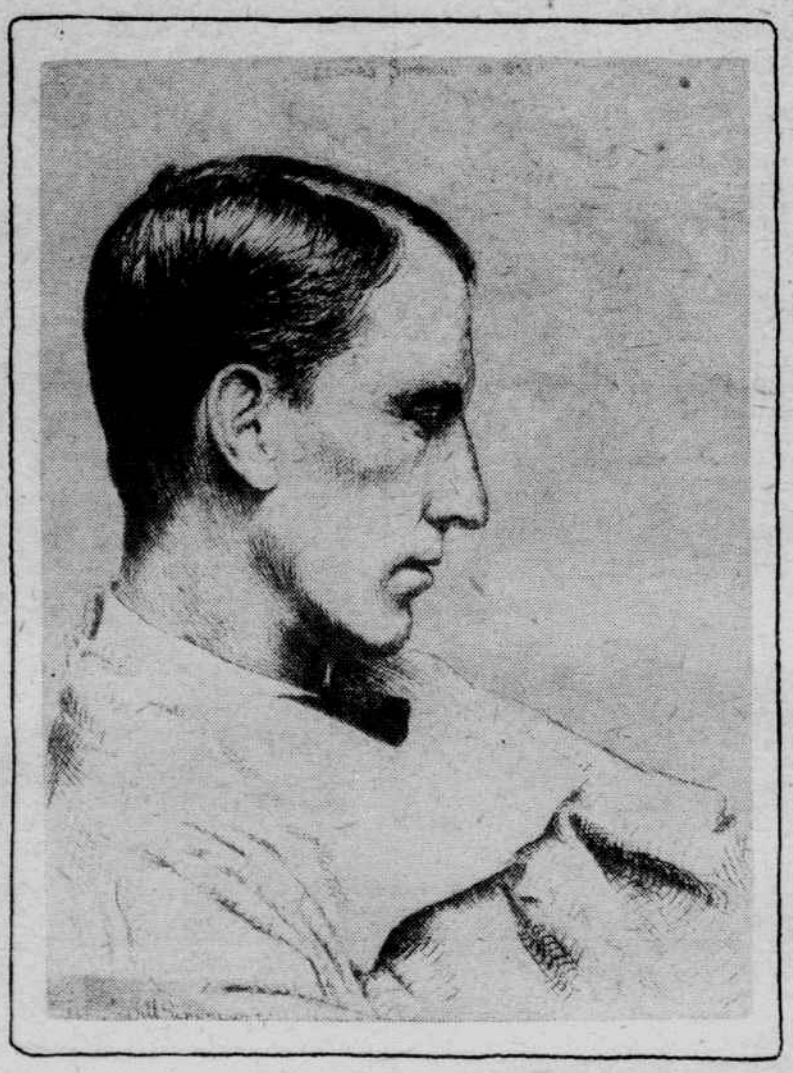

Edward Simmons in 1893.